



NSC IN SPILLED DRINK AGONY!

Selfless Members make ultimate sacrifice to recreate Chap Olympics events for Colombian TV

PLUS:

Christmas House report

The Club's answer to Big Brother

Punt, picnic 'n' plunge!

Get ready for the Club's annual Oxford jaunt

Peacock Wars

A Victorian battle of art, money and dandyism

The New Sheridan Club

Newsletter

LXIV • February 2012



The New Sheridan Club traditionally meets in the upstairs room of The Wheatsheaf, just off Oxford Street. The Wheatsheaf is one of Fitzrovia's historic pubs, a one-time haunt of Dylan Thomas, George Orwell, Augustus John and Julian Maclaren-Ross. In fact Thomas met his wife Caitlin in The Wheatsheaf and, legend has it, he was known to flash at women there as well. Fitzrovia's associations with literature go back to the eighteenth century. In the twentieth century both Woolf and Shaw lived in Fitzroy Square; Pound and Lewis launched *Blast!* at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel in Percy Street. John Buchan lived in Portland Place and in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* Richard Hannay has a flat there. Both Lawrences (D.H. and T.E.) took rooms there, as did Aleister Crowley, Wilfred Owen, Rupert Brooke and Katherine Mansfield.

The Next Meeting

The next Club Meeting will take place on Wednesday 1st February in the upstairs room at The Wheatsheaf, 25 Rathbone Place, London W1T 1JB, from 7pm until 11pm, when Ensign Polyethyl will get our blood up with *EAN's Driving in the Great War*, which she describes in characteristically bullish fashion as, "A talk about how the best corps were the first reservists to reach the front line, the most expert and delightful ambulance drivers and dedicated and charming rescue workers. An evening about beautiful girls in khaki and leather uniform, driving fast cars and ambulances."



The Last Meeting

At our January gathering Evadne Raccat gave us a splendid and surprising talk about the little-known collection of wax (and in some cases, plaster, wood, straw and leather) effigies held by Westminster Abbey of some of the more notable people buried there. Sometimes taken as death masks, sometimes sculpted and sometimes dressed

expensively in the real person's clothes, these were mostly of monarchs and were intended to keep the image of the monarch—or more importantly of the monarchy—alive while the permanent stone monument was being made. They fell out of fashion, many were damaged, and were consigned to a cupboard, in bits, until being later rediscovered and conserved. The one oddity is that of Nelson—because he is not actually buried at the abbey. By this stage the effigies were more of a tourist attraction than a religious or social

symbol and Westminster wanted one mainly to make up for the humiliation of having Nelson's actual body buried at St Paul's.

Once more we were graced by a film crew, this

time from Colombia, sent on a mission to film not just the 2012 Olympics but also some fun and unexpected aspects of London life—so naturally they were drawn to the NSC like flies to a corpse. They interviewed extensively and even had us recreate a couple of the Chap Olympics events for them...



(Left) Torquil is grilled on camera; (above) Evadne waits in the wings to take the podium; (right) she kicks off her lecture with a slide



(Above) this deviant foreigner is made to put on a tie; (below, l-r) Dorian Loveday, Robert Beckwith and William Maple Watermere



of Westminster Abbey; (below right) the attentive audience; (below) Chuckles gives the Colombian film crew a soundbite (in Spanish, the show-off)



(Below left, l-r) Richard Evans, Neil from Orkney and Mark Gidman; (below) the sort of heart-warming still life with hats that one stumbles upon at the New Sheridan Club



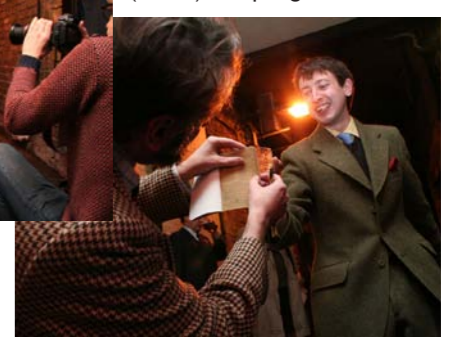
(Below) The rare sight of Robert filling a pipe; (below right) the rarer sight of Senior Sub, now a public school master



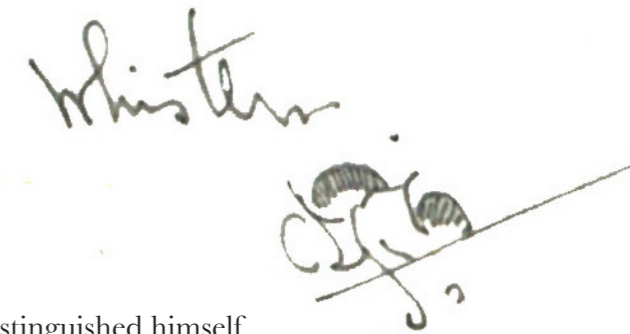
(Above) a spontaneous outbreak of affability; (left) Compton-Bassett attempts the Hop, Skip and G&T event; (below) his spillage is measured



(Left) Manifest drink spillage as Giles Culpepper tries the Hop, Skip and G&T



JAMES McNEILL WHISTLER



BY MRS H. & THE BATTLE OF THE PEACOCK ROOM

WE BEGIN OUR STORY with a painting, *The Fighting Peacocks* (fig.1). Its subtitle, *Art and Money*, reflects a key debate in 19th-century culture and its creator, James Abbott McNeill Whistler, played an important role in the emergence of the modern idea of the artist as someone with authority over his art and its value, rather than a craftsman for hire.

The Fighting Peacocks is actually a portrait of the story's two protagonists. The bird on the left, looking elegant but affronted, represents Whistler. Its long silver crest feather refers to the white lock of hair of which he was inordinately proud, fluffing it up and declaring it the mark of the Devil (who seized his chosen ones by a lock of hair). Sheridanites might know Whistler well, as he had several Chappish attributes (fig.2). He was a dandy and a wit, who managed to live elegantly beyond his means for much of his life. On the downside he was rather vain,

How two gentlemen nearly came to blows over art, money – and the difference between guineas and pounds

a self-publicist who engaged a cuttings service to alert him to each occasion that his name appeared in the Press. When it did, he could be exceptionally litigious (the subject index of his correspondence, edited by Glasgow University, lists seven separate lawsuits). He was also prone to violence, once throwing his brother-in-law through a plate-glass window, which understandably caused tensions within the family ever after.

Whistler was prone to fabricating aspects of his life story as it suited him, but here are a few facts. He was born in 1834 in Lowell, Massachusetts, though he often denied this: "I was not born in Lowell — and Massachusetts knows me not." It was too northerly an origin for one who identified himself as a Southern



Fig. 2, c.1885

gentleman. On occasion he even claimed to have been born in St Petersburg, probably inspired by the experience of spending part of his childhood in Russia (1843–49), where his father went to assist in building the railways. James is known to have taken some drawing lessons there. After his father's death the remaining Whistlers returned to America via England and Scotland, and James saw more art, including the Raphael cartoons then at Hampton Court (now in the V&A).

He did not immediately embark on an artistic career, however, instead following his father to the military academy of West Point. There he quickly proved that he was not destined for the army. He was particularly bad at cavalry drill, often falling over the horse's head, at which his commanding officer would enquire, "Mr. Whistler, aren't you a little ahead of the squad?" (He doesn't seem to have become a crack shot, either. Much later he accidentally dispatched a friend's dog rather than the intended gamebird. He explained: "Yes: I did shoot the dog. It was a dog without artistic habits, and had placed itself badly in relation to the landscape.") Although top of the class for drawing, he did not apply himself to his studies, and in his third year he was finally expelled for "deficiency in chemistry" (he blamed this on the fact that silicon was not a gas) and no doubt for a number of disciplinary infractions. He

had also distinguished himself by managing to catch gonorrhoea while at West Point. On leaving the academy he had to find a job, and so joined the US Coastal and Geodetic Survey, where he learned to etch. But it was clear that if he was to embark on a serious career as an artist, he must train in Europe. He left America in 1855, and never went back.

In Paris, Whistler took the traditional route to a painterly education and studied under an Academician, Charles Gleyre, but he also threw himself into the *vie bohème*. He shared a studio with fellow art students, two of whom were also to find fame, Edwin Poynter and George du Maurier, the cartoonist. Du Maurier later drew on this experience when writing his novel *Trilby*. When this was first published as a serial in *Harper's* magazine, one of the most entertaining characters was the idle and eccentric Joe Sibley. Whistler threatened to sue Du Maurier if Sibley (and any illustrations of him) was not removed; Du Maurier complied. The affair won his book much valuable publicity, though it was probably the worse for the rewriting of the character as "Antony the Swiss".

While a student, Whistler got to know key figures in the French avant garde but when his etchings proved popular in London it was there that he moved, in 1859. He soon took up with a mistress, Jo Hiffernan, who became his common-law wife and the model for his early paintings. He also fell in with the Pre-Raphaelites, in particular Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He lived near Rossetti in Chelsea and his bohemian existence continued until his mother arrived from America in 1863 (running the Union blockade), and moved in with him. Jo had to be removed to separate lodgings, and Anna Whistler took over his domestic routine.

Whistler and Rossetti were notable early British collectors of Chinese blue-and-white porcelain and Japanese prints. This enthusiasm eventually became a craze extensive enough to be satirised along with the whole Aesthetic Movement. Du Maurier was among those



Fig. 1, *The Fighting Peacocks*, 1876–7



poking fun at the chinamanics and Aesthetes (fig.3); in his cartoon the figure of Algernon is clearly meant for Oscar Wilde, at one time heavily under Whistler's influence. Both men became publicly associated with the idea of "art for art's sake", art esteemed for its formal qualities and free from narrative. In the second half of the 1860s Whistler was concentrating on making work "beyond what merely 'would sell'", focusing on arrangements of classically inspired female figures; but his rate of production was slow and he needed money. At this point he met his most important patron, Frederick Richards Leyland.

The second bird in the *Fighting Peacocks* represents Leyland as haughty and aggressive, for reasons that will become obvious. He seems to have risen without trace to become a Liverpool shipping magnate, and rumours that he had worked his way up the steamship company from office boy to owner by telling tales about his co-workers suggests that he was never a popular figure. He was clearly ambitious and intelligent, and despite his obscure beginnings developed a daring taste for contemporary art. His main love was music, however, and he practised the piano every day (once, when Leyland had been running through scales endlessly, a workman in the house remarked that the master "must be a light-hearted gentleman", to Whistler's great amusement). It was Leyland who suggested to Whistler the musical title of "nocturnes" for some of his landscape paintings. Tall and elegant, Leyland was also noted for his dandyism in the Beau Brummell sense (fig.4), paying attention to the cut of his black suits and wearing a white ruffled shirt, which is echoed in the silver breast feathers in the *Fighting Peacocks*; in Liverpool he was said to wear a new pair of



Fig. 4, J.M. Whistler, *Arrangement in Black: Portrait of F.R. Leyland*, 1870-73



Fig. 5, J.M. Whistler, *Symphony in Flesh Colour and Pink: Portrait of Mrs Frederick R. Leyland*, 1871-7

kid gloves every day.

Leyland probably met Whistler around 1867, when he commissioned an important picture from him, *The Three Girls*, which was never to be finished. Despite this, Leyland was a patient patron who ordered other paintings and had no problem advancing Whistler 50 guineas here and there when asked. Whistler spent a lot of time on various projects at Leyland's manor house, Speke Hall near Liverpool, got on well with the children and even became engaged to one of Leyland's sisters-in-law. But he never finished commissioned portraits of the Leyland youngsters, and even his portrait of Frances Leyland (fig.5) is incomplete, although he put great effort into it, designing every aspect, including the dress. (When Mrs Leyland couldn't sit for this, Whistler's next mistress, Maud Franklin, stood in.)

By 1875, Leyland needed a London home where he could stay when on business, and where his family could enjoy "the season". To this end he bought 49 Prince's Gate, Kensington, and, before moving in, set about an extensive remodelling. Leyland hired artists to decorate the interior, and Whistler was commissioned to decorate the hall stair panels, seemingly a small job but part of the first impression made on visitors. A surviving panel shows Whistler's very loose, Japanese-influenced floral decoration on a background of varnished metal leaf (called "dutch metal"), intended to look like old gold.

Works by Whistler were also to be given pride of place in the dining room, where *La Princesse des pays de la porcelaine*, an earlier painting, was to hang at one end; at the other end Leyland intended to place the still-undelivered *Three Girls*. The paintings would be surrounded by Leyland's own collection of oriental porcelains, by this time an essential attribute for an Aesthetic interior. The construction of a suitable setting for the wares had been entrusted to Thomas Jekyll, a well-known Arts and Crafts designer. He built an elegant system of walnut shelves in sizes dictated by the porcelain pieces



Fig. 6, Tennessee Dixon, reconstruction of original appearance of dining room at 49 Prince's Gate in early 1876

that were to stand on them. (It was also free-standing and could be dismantled, a fact that would be crucial to the later survival of the entire room.) By April 1876 his work was almost finished: a reconstruction (fig.6) shows the spindly shelves against walls hung with antique gilded leather, which had been specially bought by Leyland for the room for £1000, and Whistler's painting in pride of place above them. But Jekyll had come to an impasse over what colour to paint the window shutters and doors. He thought of yellow and white: Leyland suggested that the woodwork should be gilded, to match what had been done in the hall, and he asked Whistler to carry this out.

Whistler didn't need asking twice, as he took a keen interest in interior and exhibition design, especially the way his own art was to be hung. He was also skint. Initially he worked in sympathy with Jekyll's scheme, though he

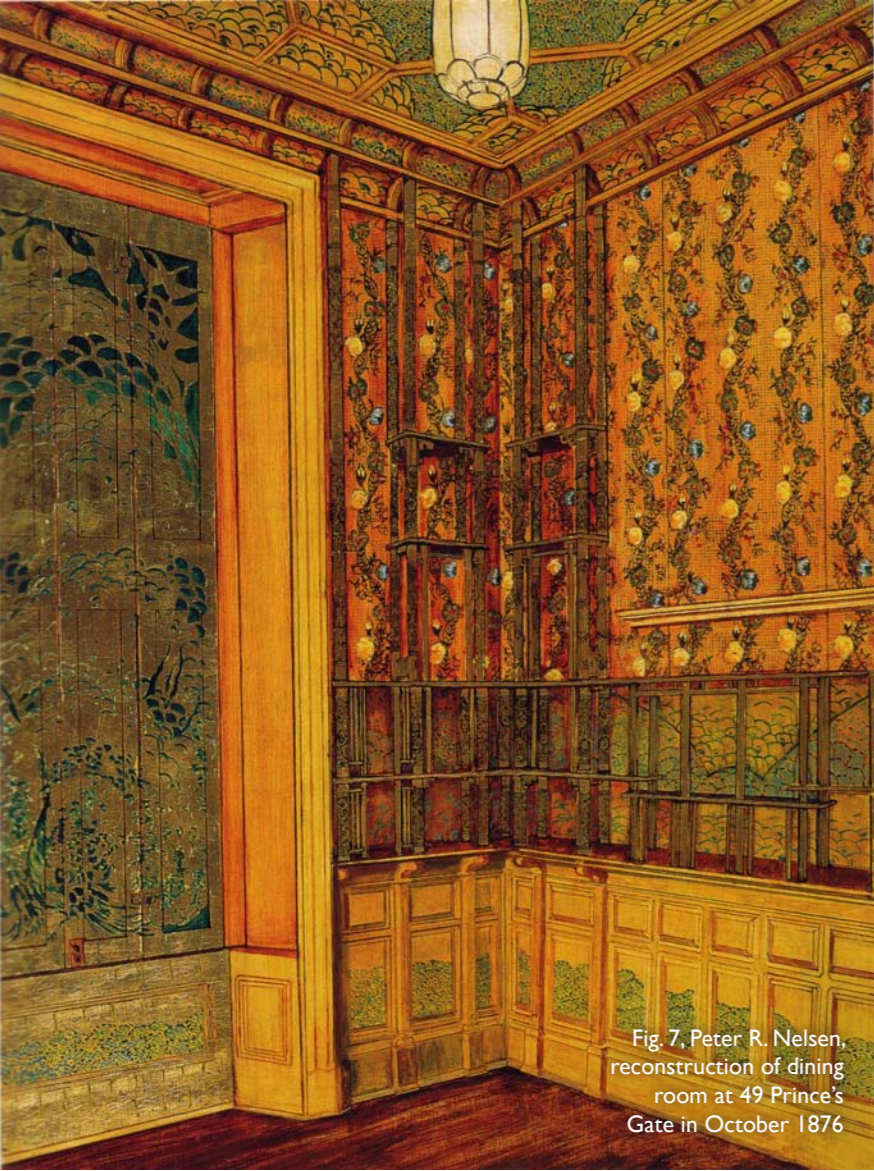


Fig. 7, Peter R. Nelsen, reconstruction of dining room at 49 Prince's Gate in October 1876

suggested touching up the red flowers on the leather with yellow, so as not to clash with his painting *La Princesse*; Leyland agreed. In August, Whistler declared the room finished apart from a “minor detail”, some blue “wave” motifs he wanted to paint over the gold of the dado and the cornice. Leyland trusted him, and from Liverpool sent a cheque for £50, telling Whistler to let him know when he had finished. But now Whistler couldn't leave the decor alone and continued experimenting, despite the physical difficulty of the work (some paint samples have 13 layers). The wave design became peacock feather motifs, and carried on to the ceiling. Next Whistler painted the shutters with peacocks (a motif developed from his interest in Japanese art), all without Leyland's authorization (fig.7). He asked Leyland to stay away until he had quite finished: but at the same time he invited other people to see the work—at first just family and close friends, but gradually other artists, society figures and the press.

In October 1876, Leyland returned unexpectedly to London, and failed to express

the appreciation Whistler had expected. Not unreasonably, he also refused to pay the £2000 Whistler wanted for a scheme much more elaborate than originally envisaged. Eventually, the artist agreed to £1000 (compare this to £150 to lease a Mayfair flat for a year, or £11 for a Savile Row suit), on condition that he be allowed a few more months to finish the decoration. In an effort to get Whistler out of his house, Leyland agreed, and sent a cheque for £1000. Whistler declared himself insulted at not being paid in guineas, as a gentleman might expect; relieved of the desire to please his patron, he painted the leather wall coverings Prussian blue and ordered a new blue carpet. In December 1876, he took further revenge by painting *The Fighting Peacocks*: not only was Leyland not going to get *The Three Girls*, but he would have to “sit at dinner, his back to the *Princesse*, and always before him the apotheosis of l'art et l'argent!” If you look back at *The Fighting Peacocks*, you will see silver scales at the peacocks' feet, representing the shillings the artist felt had been denied him.

Alerted by an article in the *Morning Post*, Leyland came to London and demanded to know what had happened to his leather walls, but amazingly he still didn't throw Whistler out. By this time the painter was inviting all society to see the room, giving them tea and generally behaving as if the house were his own; he even showed the press round other rooms. To remedy journalists' often wildly inaccurate reports he also issued a “broadside” (a kind of press release) to explain the colour scheme, in which he gave the room its own, typically “musical” title, *Harmony in Blue and Gold*. Though Leyland now called Whistler “nothing but an artistic Barnum” the press gave the room mostly favourable reviews in February 1877, although some doubted whether it would make a good dining room (blue being the least appetising colour); another thought “opium should be the most substantial food” consumed in it; and another that “locusts and honey might be allowed”. Leyland had to sit in Liverpool reading these reports (some forwarded by Whistler himself) congratulating him on owning the room.

By the time the Leylands returned for the 1877 London season, Whistler had finished painting and put the porcelain on the shelves. He had transformed the room into a unique work of art (figs 8, 9) but his relationship with his patron was irretrievably damaged. Leyland had heard rumours of Whistler having an affair with Frances Leyland. This has never been proven, but she did continue to socialise with Whistler when her husband was away. During a flurry of increasingly angry letters between the two, Leyland wrote

Sir, I am told that on Friday last you were seen walking about with my wife at Lord's Cricket Ground. After my previous letter to you on this subject it is clear that I cannot expect from you the ordinary conduct of a Gentleman and I therefore now tell you that if after this intimation I find you in her society again I will publicly horsewhip you.

Yours truly

...

Nothing daunted, Whistler continued to pillory Leyland at every opportunity, even painting a full-scale picture of him as a denuded peacock hunched over a piano and surrounded by moneybags (*The Gold Scab: Eruption in Frilthy Lucre*; fig.10). Despite all this, Leyland kept the Peacock Room as it was and even allowed callers in to see it. William Rothenstein, Aubrey Beardsley and Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac all visited (Montesquiou said of London's “aesthetic salad” that Whistler was “the principal leaf”; when he went for lunch at Whistler's house, he was served fried eggs, or “arrangements” in white and yellow).

The story ended unhappily for all its human actors. Whistler set about discovering all he could of Leyland's own affairs in an attempt to destroy his marriage, and may have succeeded. Leyland and his wife split up in 1879, and after that she was separated from her children. Her oldest daughter,

Fanny, died giving birth in 1880, and Frances Leyland was not invited to the funeral. Leyland continued to live at Prince's Gate but died suddenly in 1892, aged 60, on an underground train at Blackfriars station. Thomas Jekyll had died in 1881 in an asylum. He was probably ill before the Peacock Room was ever conceived, but it has gone down in legend as the cause of his breakdown. One particularly excitable critic wrote: “Unnoticed, a furtive figure creeps into the room. It is Jeckyll, who has heard the rumours and come to see for himself. He looks for the warm brown tone of his beautiful leather: blue shrieks at him from every corner of the room; the gold blinds him; peacock's eyes follow him; and from the midst of the crowd the ‘strident peacock laugh’ of the man who has committed this outrage. The shock cracks his brain. He staggers home and is found a few hours later muttering to himself and trying to cover the floor of his room with gold. He dies in a madhouse.”

Whistler's finances were always precarious, and in 1877 he sued John Ruskin for libel when



Fig. 8, Peacock Room north wall

Fig. 9. Peacock Room southeast corner



the critic wrote of the painting *The Falling Rocket* that he “never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face”. Leyland may have helped Ruskin’s defence. Whistler won, but was awarded only a farthing damages and the costs bankrupted him. Leyland was one of his creditors and to his chagrin was one of the overseers of the auction of his goods.

To provide for his three legitimate (and at least two illegitimate) children Leyland’s estate, Prince’s Gate and all its contents were sold. The house was bought by Mrs Blanche Watney, who thought the Peacock Room “hideous” and supposed it could be “scraped off or repainted or something”, until someone suggested it could be dismantled and sold; nevertheless she kept it for six years, storing dime novels on the shelves.

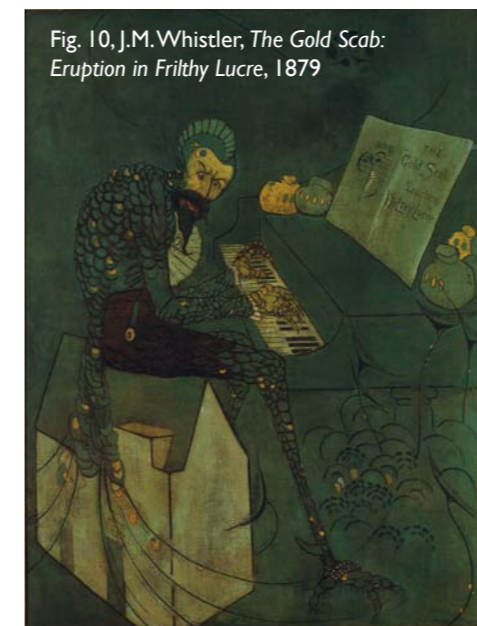


Fig. 10. J.M. Whistler, *The Gold Scab: Eruption in Frilthy Lucre*, 1879

In 1904, after several changes of mind, Mrs Watney agreed to sell. As usual, the campaign to save the room for Britain began too late. Some potential buyers wanted only parts of it and even its eventual purchaser, the American railroad tycoon Charles Lang Freer, had to be persuaded that it could and should be kept intact. Freer, who had known Whistler and been influenced by his interest in oriental art, and had already bought the painting *La Princesse*, eventually paid £8,400 (about £850,000 now). American press reports of the sale were often as wildly inaccurate as they were enthusiastic: the *Chicago Tribune*, for example, decided that the room must be all the colours of the rainbow (fig.11, 4 September 1904). At first installed in Freer’s own house in Detroit, in 1923 the room was finally moved to the museum he endowed, the Freer Gallery of Art, part of the Smithsonian Institution, in

Washington, D.C., where it remains today.

Although it now looks to us quite Victorian, the Peacock Room had been an inspiration for the rising Art Nouveau movement and has become the world’s most famous Aesthetic interior (even



Fig. 11

inspiring some of the King’s decoration at Graceland; fig.12). Whistler’s own reputation has continued to grow, too—even by the time of his death in 1903 he was recognized by many as a key figure in the transition to modernism. And his verdict on the Peacock Room was typical: on attending a mass in the basilica of San Marco in Venice, he reported “very swell it all was, but do you know I couldn’t help feeling that the Peacock Room is more beautiful in its effect!”

Most of the information and images above were filleted from The Peacock Room by Linda Merrill (Freer Gallery of Art/Yale University Press, 1998), which contains all you will ever need to know about the room and its context. To hear Whistler’s own “voice”, try the complete catalogue of his surviving correspondence, produced by Glasgow University’s Centre for Whistler Studies and found at www.whistler.arts.gla.ac.uk.



Fig. 12. The Peacock Room-inspired living room at Graceland, Memphis, TN

HOUSE OF LORDS

BY
ROBERT
BECKWITH

Once again the New Sheridan Club proves that an Englishman's home is someone else's castle, hiring a country house for a week at Christmas and pretending to live the life of landed gentry of a hundred years ago



rain battering against the windows. The assorted adventures included Mr Laurence Bennion rescuing our Ford Fiesta (after my failed attempt to drive it up the forty-five-degree stream bed that had been recommended by the satnav) by accelerating to a high speed across a boggy field and up a steep muddy hill. There were also some more sedate trips to attractive towns such as Dartmouth and Totnes, and one to the penguin house in Torquay.

Wednesday was "Christmas Day", when we had Christmas

THE SEVENTH ANNUAL Sheridan Christmas House was held in Devon this year. Fourteen Sheridanites successfully navigated to Ashwell Court, an aged farmhouse with much character, nestled between Dartmouth and Dartmoor. Not that the hinterland made a huge difference when most of the day was spent recovering from the extensive evening-based entertainments.

The weather was most forthright (I think it was trying to join us inside the house), which added no small amount of atmosphere to proceedings as we drank port by the fire, protected by the thin walls of the old house and accompanied by the sound of wind and

stockings, a "secret Santa"—each guest provided an anonymous gift for one other guest—and a hearty Christmas dinner prepared by Isabel Spooner-Harvey and her dedicated team. It was also our white tie evening. To provide some extra verisimilitude and a childlike perspective, the Beckwiths brought out their two year old son, William, who was most pleased to receive a Paddington Bear (with hat). Luckily there was no one present with a child allergy. The merriment continued 'till the not-so-small hours, to the extent that some guests were not seen again until dinner the following night.

The main excursion of the week was to Burgh Island, site of the Art Deco hotel where

Agatha Christie set two mysteries and where an episode of Poirot was filmed. We arrived on a spectacularly blustery day with great waves and lashings of spume washing over the land bridge that connects the island to the mainland at low tide. Luckily the tide was receding and the sea eventually parted for us. Unluckily the hotel would not allow us in for tea so we settled for the charming Pilchard Inn and a stroll about the island. At the former, little William won a chocolate biscuit from the barmaid by approaching, taking his hat off, and then shaking hands. I think he may be due his Sheridan Club badge for hat craft. The Inn dates from the 14th century, and has a classic littoral style. The island itself was surprisingly rugged and beautiful.

We left the house in a structurally sound condition, and there were no arrests.



(Opposite) The well-appointed Ashwell Court; (above) the house's kitchen; as you can see, pine is to the fore in true "country kitchen" idiom; (below, left to right) Isabel Spooner-Harvey, Fruity Hatfield-Peverell; Robert Beckwith, Revd Michael Silver, Laurence Bennion, Ensign Polytheyl, Rachel the Dowager Duchess of Northumberland, Fiona Salter, Seoaid Beckwith, and part of Niall Spooner-Harvey





(Top) Burgh Island Hotel nestles in the lee, out of the wind; at high tide the island is completely cut off, with access only by "sea tractor", a sort of minibus on stilts; (above) the sign of the splendid and hugely ancient Pilchard Inn; (right, l-r) Mrs Downer, Ensign Polyethyl, Master Beckwith, Mrs Beckwith;




The Inaugural NSC Club Crawl



FIVE GENTLEMAN'S CLUBS IN ONE NIGHT

LAST FRIDAY something that had been much mooted was finally attempted—a "club crawl", taking in a variety of clubs in one evening, depending on which ones the assembled Sheridanites happened to be members of. We kicked off at the Commonwealth Club (now disturbingly modern inside), courtesy of New Zealander Craig Young, before heading over to the Oxford and Cambridge where, thanks to Rachel Downer and Miss Minna, we secured a couple of tables



Mrs H. having a whale of a time at the East India Club

for dinner. After that it was on to the Carlton (with which Robert Beckwith, a member of the Hurlingham, has a reciprocal arrangement), then the East India, of which Scarheart and Dickie Sampson are members, before winding up the In and Out thanks to Capt. Coppice for some after-hours toping. A most enjoyable evening, with excellent food and no real effort given the proximity of the establishments to one another. And we weren't thrown out of anywhere, which is possibly a cause for shame. Still, next time...



Survivors' photo at the East India: (l-r) Clayton Hartley, Robert Beckwith, Artemis Scarheart, Rachel Downer, Dickie Sampson, Capt. Coppice, David "Affability" Hollander, Rosie, Anton Krause, Craig Young



(Left) "Christmas Day" dinner is served; (Below) the exertions of his adventure holiday take their toll on Robert



Anton shoots a cuff in the Carlton Club



At the end of the evening, somewhat the worse for wear, at the Naval and Military Club, a.k.a. the In and Out

The Cocktail Cabinet

Wherein Members tattle about tipples



Chocs Away

By David Bridgman-Smith

I know for a fact that there are a good few club members who enjoy the odd bit of chocolate. But cocktails made with chocolate have the reputation of being overly sweet and sickly. That does not have to be the case.

So for this February edition of the *Cocktail Cabinet* I shall be looking at chocolate cocktails, taking inspiration from Mrs. B's Chocolate and Whisky Tasting Kit from Green & Black, a present she was given for Christmas.

A key ingredient for many of these cocktails is a simple chocolate vodka or dry cacao. You can make this simply by adding 2 tablespoons of unsweetened cocoa to 350ml of plain vodka. Leave this to sit for only about an hour or so and then strain.

1. King's Ransom

- 20ml Cognac
- 20ml The King's Ginger (by Berry Bros & Rudd)
- 20ml Chocolate vodka

Shake all ingredients with ice and strain into a cocktail glass. A light foam forms on this drink (see photo), which is quite smooth initially with the flavour of the cognac followed by definite but dry flavours of ginger and chocolate, somewhat reminiscent of Bendick's Chocolate-Covered Ginger. A nice complexity and very good for an after-dinner cocktail.

2. Chocolate Mint Soda Collins

- 40ml gin
- 20ml chocolate vodka
- 10ml crème de menthe
- Juice of half a lemon

Add all ingredients to a highball glass filled with ice and stir. A crisp and refreshing long drink with a vague hint of mint and chocolate. Like mint choc chip ice cream but without creaminess. Far more convincing in practice than on paper and a rare instance of a long, dry chocolate drink.



3. Hard Chocolate Soda

- 100ml milk
- 1 scoop chocolate ice cream



- Chocolate sauce
- Soda water
- Vanilla vodka (optional)

Coat the sides of the glass with chocolate sauce, add the ice cream and milk, then top with soda water.

Lots of rich chocolate flavour but soda water brightens it up a bit. To make it alcoholic just add vodka, though you won't taste it. Try using vanilla vodka for an extra creamy layer. Very indulgent but, oh, so tasty. Even better as the ice cream melts. I used Green & Black's ice cream which stops it from being too sugary. If you have a sweet tooth just use normal choc ice cream.

4. Cherry and the Pacemakers

- 40ml chocolate vodka
- 40ml cherry brandy

Shake the two ingredients with ice and strain into a cocktail glass. A simple yet delicious

drink: very dry but with a fruity, cherry hint that gives an impression of sweetness—despite the use of sweet cherry brandy the drink is far from sugary. A pleasant light chocolate foam on the top. A very adult chocolate drink but exceptionally smooth.

5. Chocolate Negroni

- 40ml chocolate vodka
- 40ml sweet red vermouth, e.g. Martini Rosso
- 40ml Campari

Add all ingredients to an ice-filled glass and stir. The bitterness of the dark chocolate works well with the bitter Campari and herbal vermouth but the drink is missing some dry spice which is usually given by the juniper in gin. Consequently the profile of the drink is a bit flat and seems to be operating at only 70%. Needs more body. Now, a chocolate gin might work well...

I tested this theory by whipping up a batch of chocolate gin (testament to how quick and easy it is to do) using Broker's Gin and indeed it does work well. Chocolate on the nose then the usual bitter sweet and dry Negroni followed by a dry chocolate finish.

For more cocktail recipes, product reviews and musings on booze, see the *New Sheridan Club's Institute for Alcoholic Experimentation*

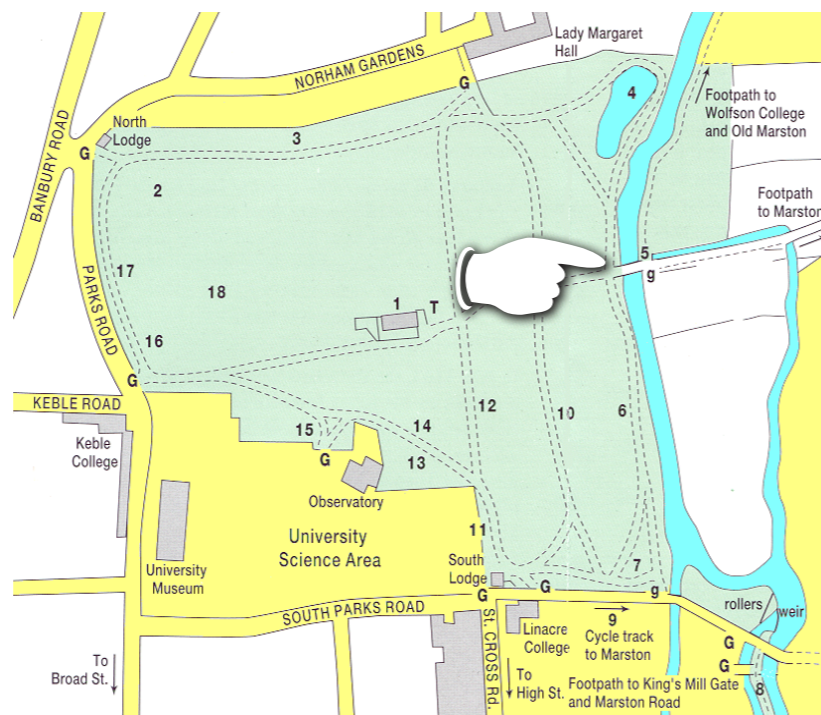




CLUB NOTES

Annual NSC Punt, Picnic n' Plunge

ONE OF THE oldest Sheridan traditions is the St George's Day punting trip to Oxford held, as you have probably already guessed, on the Saturday nearest to St George's Day: 21st April this time. Folk generally gather in the Turf Tavern, 4-5 Bath Place, Oxford, from around 11am and aim to hit the Magdalen Bridge Boathouse at midday where the punts are picked up. Punting then takes place until the traditional picnic spot is reached by the High Bridge (a.k.a. the Rainbow Bridge)



in the University Parks (no. 5 on the map). After a picnic lunch the party punts back—with someone traditionally going overboard—and repairs to a hostelry, frequently the Turf again. There is sometimes also a black tie meal in a restaurant on the Friday. As the whole event is not usually organised by the Committee (indeed the first punt was held a year before the NSC was formed) I suggest you keep an eye on the forum and Facebook event, but I'll endeavour to keep the website Events page up to date as well.



Membership fees to be revised

As you may be aware, I have recently been trying to rationalise the Membership database, work out who are still active Members and get people up to date with their subscriptions. This is, of course, pretty time-consuming, so it was with a glad cry that I discovered the existence of PayPal Subscriptions, an easy way to set up repeating payments. In the ideal world all Members would use these, and their annual fees would be wafted into the Club coffers without either them or me having to think about it. (I imagine a bank standing order would work as well, and would avoid PayPal fees, but I don't know how easy these are to set up—and PayPal has the advantage that I get an email notification of the payment, increasing the likelihood that I might keep vaguely accurate records.)

To this end the Committee have decided to revise the Membership fees, which haven't changed in five years:

- Standard fees will rise by £2.50 a year.
- However, the supplement we used to charge for paying by PayPal will now be abolished.
- Moreover, fees paid by automatic annual subscription will be £1 cheaper per year

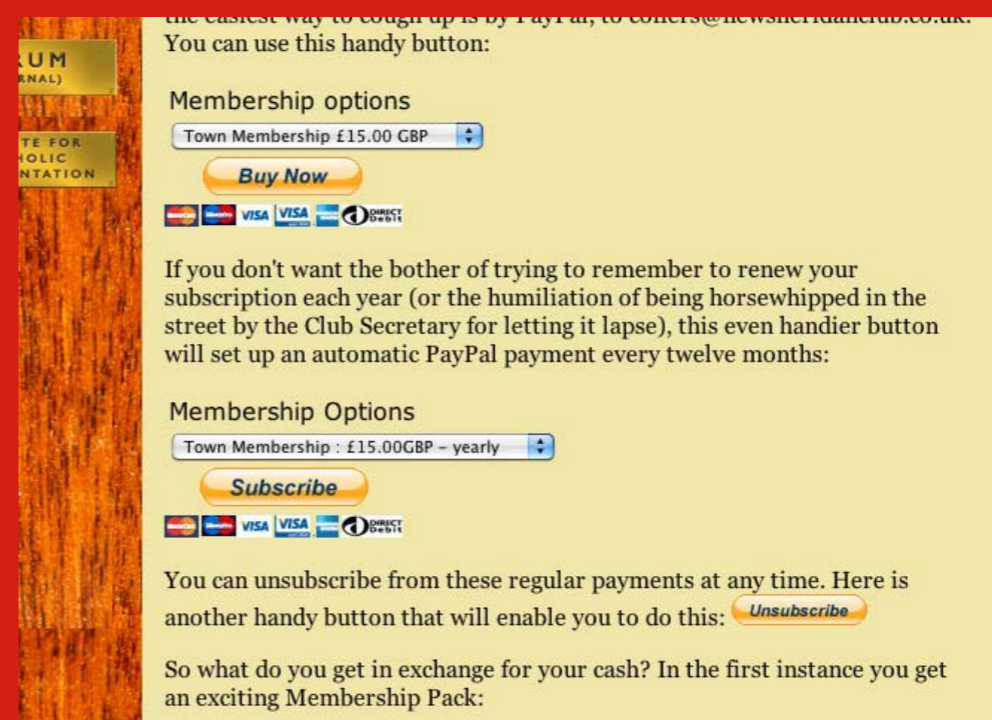
than fees paid by single payment. The PayPal subscription button was introduced last month and you can find it on the Membership page of our website: www.newsheridanclub.co.uk/membership.htm. The subscription can be cancelled at any time (though doing so cancels your membership).

	OLD	NEW
<i>One-off payments:</i>		
Town Membership	£15 pa	£17.50 pa
Country Membership	£10 pa	£12.50 pa
Overseas Membership	£5 pa	£7.50 Pa
<i>Payments by PayPal:</i>		
Town Membership	£15.75 pa	£17.50 pa
Country Membership	£10.50 pa	£12.50 pa
Overseas Membership	£5.50 pa	£7.50 pa
<i>Automatically repeating PayPal Subscriptions:</i>		
Town Membership	£15.75 pa	£16.50 pa
Country Membership	£10.50 pa	£11.50 pa
Overseas Membership	£5.50 pa	£6.50 pa

THESE CHANGES WILL TAKE PLACE FROM MIDNIGHT ON MONDAY 13TH FEBRUARY.

NOTE that if you subscribe or resubscribe BEFORE 13th February you may do so at the OLD RATES. Not only that, but we are currently WAIVING THE PAYPAL SUPPLEMENT we used to charge.

This means that if you take out a PayPal Subscription before 13th February, you will continue to pay the old rates indefinitely (with no PayPal supplement).



Those glorious PayPal buttons. As you can see, we are currently waiving the old PayPal supplement



A Fruity Bonus for the Tashes

EVERY GENTLEMAN'S CLUB has its own wines—a Club Claret, for instance, and a Club Port in all likelihood. Well, now the New Sheridan Club has its own sloe gin. At the Tashes cricket match last summer some of the spectators noticed that the hedgerow on the boundary of the grounds was (no doubt thanks to the unusual weather) already producing sloes. Dave “Affability” Hollander (hereafter known as Dave “Sloe Hand” Hollander) gathered as many usable ones as he could find and produced a special cuvée of The Tashes Sloe Gin, a bottle of which he recently presented to me.

I had bottles of Hayman's and Hawker's commercial sloe gins on hand for comparison. The Tashes is paler and pinkish, compared to the red-brown hue of the others, but they are older and have been kept in clear bottles. The Tashes has a delicate nose of rosehip fruitiness balanced by juniper and warm coffee notes. It is not too syrupy, the sweetness balanced by sloe acidity. It has a long, lingering, warm finish. Hayman's is heavier, with more juniper, compared to the Tashes's greener, sappier freshness and rose-like florality. Hawker's is even more juniper-heavy, reminding you more strongly that sloe gin starts as gin. It also has a dry, aromatic spice, like sandalwood. As sloe gins go, the Tashes is light, fresh and fruity.

In a Sloe Gin Fizz/Sloe Motion/Sloe Royale—sloe gin and Champagne—the Tashes is delightful. It needs a bit more in the mix



than some sloe gins but the result is delicate yet distinct in colour and fruit, allowing the Champagne's own character to remain.

Where can you buy some? Sadly the unseasonal yield on the occasion produced enough sloes for just one bottle...



New Members

AS TEMPERATURES FINALLY drop to where they ought to be this time of year we throw a log on the fire of idle conviviality and push the following slumbering covers up to the flames, all of whom have joined the Club in the last month: Susannah, Queen of Dalriada, Florian Kurt Schwetz, Michael Heys, Dave Packer, Daniel Swan, Peng Hui Lee, Hannah Von Meow, Christian Minet, Edward Tweed, Derek Dubery and John Hector.

Forthcoming Events

BOTH OFFICIAL NSC JAUNTS (🔴) AND THIRD-PARTY WHEEZES WE THINK YOU MIGHT ENJOY

FOR THE LATEST developments, see the Events page at www.newsheridanclub.co.uk plus our Facebook page and the web forum.

🔴 NSC Club Night
Wednesday 1st February
8pm–11pm

Upstairs, The Wheatsheaf, 25 Rathbone Place, London W1T 1JB

Members: Free
Non-Members: £2 (first visit free)
See page 2.

Cakewalk Café

Wednesdays 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th February
8pm–1am (swing dance classes 7–8pm and 8–9pm)

Passing Clouds, 1 Richmond Road, Dalston, London E8 4AA

Admission: £5 (£3.50 if you're in 1920s/1930s clobber) or £8 including a dance class; £12 including both.

Live swing jazz every Wednesday featuring Nicholas Ball, Ewan Bleach and chums, with

optional dance classes from Swing Patrol.

Blues Dance Weekend

Thursday 2nd to Sunday 5th February

Time: See the schedule at www.europeanbluesinvasion.com

Venue: Various London venues: see the schedule

Admission: From £75

London's Mouthful O' Jam has paired

with the American-based Blues Recess Contingent to host a blues dance weekend.



There will be four nights of blues dancing and three full days of blues workshops, taking place at a range of London venues. Not only that, but they are flying in five top-level American blues dance instructors and DJs to head the workshops and musical lineup. They will also be featuring a few vendors at the event: Rowena Howie's Revival Retro and Colin Johnson's Johnson Shoes. If anyone is interested in setting up a stall at the event please contact Gaia at



europeanbluesinvasion@gmail.com to discuss fees and availability.

Swing at the Light

Mondays 6th, 13th, 20th and 27th February
From 7pm

Upstairs at The Light Restaurant and Bar,
233 Shoreditch High Street, London E1

Admission: £8 for class and club, £3 just for
the club night after 9pm

Dress: Vintage/retro appreciated

Weekly vintage dance night in a venue with a wooden floor and its own terrace, curated by the Quick! Quick Club. Beginners classes from 7.30, intermediate from 8.15 and “freestyle” from 9pm.

The Candlelight Club

Friday 10th and Saturday 11th February
7.30pm–12am

A secret central London location

Admission: Tickets £15 in advance from
www.thecandlelightclub.com.

Dress: 1920s dandies and swells, gangsters and molls, degenerate aristos and aesthetes, corrupt politicians and the Smart Set In the Know

The Candlelight Club is a clandestine pop-up cocktail bar with a 1920s speakeasy flavour, in a secret London venue completely lit by candles. Each event offers a one-off cocktail menu with special themes and featured ingredients. There are live period jazz bands, vintage DJing from

the NSC’s own MC Fruity plus sometimes dance or burlesque acts. This time it’s our “Valentine’s Day Massacre”: watch us shoehorn romance and gangster slayings into one theme, with a cocktail menu that reflects both Guns and Roses. As it were. Plus sultry live jazz from the delightfully bonkers Gracie and the G-Spots.

The Fitzrovia Radio Hour

Friday 10th and Saturday 11th February
7.30pm

The Heron Theatre, Stanley Street, Beetham,
Milnthorpe, Cumbria LA7 7AS (015395 64283)
Admission: £10

Delightful spoof 1930s stage show in the semblance of a live radio show, with much comic business derived from the live production of sound effects. The troupe have previously performed at an NSC party.

Saturday Night Swing Club

Saturday 11th February

7.30pm–2am

City Firefly, 18 Old Bailey, London EC4M 7EP
Admission: £12 (includes a £3 drinks voucher)

Three dance floors of swing, R’n’B and rock’n’roll music from the 1920s–1950s, with DJs Dr Swing and Simon “Mr Kicks” Selmon, plus guest DJs this time Swanny and the Bees Knees. On the middle floor there are dance classes from 8.15 till midnight. Guest teachers

this time are Natasha and Paul (collegiate shag) and the Bees Knees (1920s Charleston).

The Wiyos plus Meschiya Lake and the Little Big Horns

Sunday 12th February
7.30pm

Dingwalls, Middle Yard,
Camden Lock,

London NW1 8AB

Admission: £15 (book at www.dingwalls.com)

A sizzling double bill of ultra-hot US acts breathing dynamic new life into Depression-era sounds. New Orleans-based singer Meschiya Lake, crowned as Best Female Performer in the 2011 Big



The Fitzrovia Radio Hour

Film Night rises from the ashes

Monday 20th February
7pm–11pm

The Tea House Theatre,
139 Vauxhall Walk,
London SE11 5HL

(020 7207 4585)

Admission: Free

The Club Film
Nights return with a presentation, curated by Lord Compton-Bassett, of the BBC production *Beau Brummel: This Charming Man*, starring James Purefoy and Hugh Bonneville. C-B will give a brief history of Brummell

and Regency dress by way of an introduction. Originally scheduled for last month, this event was postponed when the old venue closed down unannounced (oddly, not the first time this has happened to one of our film



nights). Thanks to Members Grace and Harry, proprietors of the Tea House Theatre, for letting us use their gaff.

Doors will open at 7pm and there will be exquisite food and booze available. The screening will kick off around 8pm.

Easy Music Awards, is spearheading a revival in swing-dance, lindy-hop and jitterbug music, belting out classics by the likes of Jelly Roll Morton, Duke Ellington and Bessie Smith alongside richly seasoned originals, at the helm of a line-up featuring trumpet, trombone, sousaphone, washboard and guitar. The Wiyos, named after a 19th-century New York street gang, likewise put a stylish contemporary spin on their self-styled mix of “vaudevillian ragtime jug-band blues and hillbilly swing”, splicing it with strands of pop, rock and hip-hop. With their debut album, 2009’s *Broken Land Bell* having earned them a tour support slot with Bob Dylan, they’ll be previewing tracks from its forthcoming follow-up *Twist*, inspired by The Wizard of Oz.

The Fitzrovia Radio Hour

Sunday 12th February

7pm

The Maltings Theatre and Arts Centre, Berwick
on Tweed, TD15 1AJ (01289 330999)

Admission: £12 (£10 concs)

See above.

The Fitzrovia Radio Hour

Monday 13th February

7.30pm

Theatre by the Lake, Keswick, CA12 5DJ

Admission: £15, £13 or £10

See above.

Valentines at the Tea House

Tuesday 14th February

The Tea House Theatre, 139 Vauxhall Walk,
London SE11 5HL (020 7207 4585)

Evening

Admission: £49 for four courses including wine and entertainment

NSC Members Harry and Grace Iggulden run this establishment, which was not only the venue for the last Club summer party but also consequently ended up appearing in the TV doc *A Very British Party*. For St Valentine’s Day they have devised a romantic dinner menu, described as “ancient Greek love food with a modern touch”. There will be candles, roses and live music from a soul trio, with the opportunity to dance later. Just 25 bookings will be taken and,



New Orleans Mardi Gras revellers from c. 1910 and (below) c. 1937

as on this night “you should only have eyes for your lover”, the staff will all be masked and discrete. Just have a gander at the menu:

- Country Chesnut & Ginger Soup with White Sage Sourdough Bread; or Foie Gras with Marinated Celeriac, Apples & Confit Raisins
 - Rack of Lamb with Braised Chicory and Fondue Potatoes, garnished with Love-Red Onion and Peppers, served with a Red Pepper Reduction and a Red Wine Jus; or Wild Mushroom and White Wine Risotto with Avocado Butter Sauce
 - Lemon-Lapsang Jelly with Vanilla Ice Cream and Almond Tuile; or Chocolate Mouse with Pomegranate
- A glass of red or white wine will compliment each course with a pot of tea and petits fours to finish

The Fitzrovia Radio Hour

Tuesdays 14th, 21st and 28th February and 6th March
8pm
The Ambassadors Theatre, West Street, London WC2
Admission: £19.50 or £27.50
See above.

The Candlelight Club: Mardi Gras

Friday 17th and Saturday 18th February
7.30pm–12am
A secret central London location
Admission: Tickets £15 in advance from www.thecandlelightclub.com.
Dress: 1920s dandies and swells, gangsters and molls, degenerate aristos and decadent aesthetes, corrupt politicians and the Smart Set In the Know
See above. This time it’s New Orleans Mardi Gras: Mardi Gras (“Fat Tuesday”) is the last day before Lent. In Britain we eat pancakes, but in New Orleans they have

a huge carnival party with parades, masks and shiny trinkets, a tradition dating back to the 18th century. Come and help us celebrate the music and cocktails of the Big Easy—which is also the home of absinthe in America.

The Eccentric Club Open Convivial Meeting

Friday 17th February
7.13pm
The Savile Club, 69 Brook Street, Mayfair, London
Admission: £20 in advance from www.eccentricclub.co.uk

Dress: Eccentrically overdressed, glamorous Members, friends (which includes NSC Members) and new candidates of the Eccentric Club gather for an evening of conversation, drinks and performances by the Club members and the surprise guests.

“It’s a Wonderful Vintage Love Boat Ball”

Friday 17th February
8pm–2am
The Battersea Barge, Nine Elms Lane, London SW8 5BP
Admission: £15 in advance from WeGotTickets
Dress: Strictly vintage; nautical appreciated
A Valentine’s-themed vintage knees-up on a static barge featuring live jazz and vintage DJs,

tarot and psychic readings, a roving magician, vintage photo booth, burlesque plus dance competitions.

The Ric Rac Club

Saturday 18th February
8pm–2am
The Fox, 28–30 Paul Street, Shoreditch, London EC2A 4LB
Admission: £8 in advance from www.thevintagemafia.com, £10 on the door
Dress: Your finest sartorial splendour

The Vintage Mafia preside over their club night in this characterful pub with two floors with a smoking terrace. All guests receive a free King’s Ginger cocktail on arrival, and there will be dancing to music from 1930s dance bands to 1960s Northern Soul, with DJing by the Vintage Mafia ladies and special guest All Fringe, No Knickers, plus a set by ukulele lady Miss G. There will also be a free raffle.

The Orphanage St Valentine’s Masked Ball

Saturday 18th February
10pm–3am
Adam Street, 9 Adam Street, off Strand,
Admission: £25 in advance from theorphanagedance.co.uk/tickets.html
Dress: Divine decadence; “masks obligatory, clothes optional”

A Viktor Wynd joint in Georgian tunnels beneath the Strand. There is an optional dance lesson beforehand at 9pm for an extra £5.

Clerkenwell Vintage Fashion Fair

Sunday 19th February
11am–5pm (trade from 10.30am)
The Old Finsbury Town Hall, Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4RP
Admission: £4 (£5 trade before 11am)
Some 50 stalls offering vintage clothes, shoes, handbags, hats, gloves, textiles and jewellery from the 1800s to the 1980s, plus vintage posters this time too. There is also a tea room, alterations booth plus sometimes live entertainment too. More details at www.clerkenwellvintagefashionfair.co.uk.

The Old Fashioned Dating Company Launch Night

Wednesday 22nd February

Doors 6pm; dating from 6.30pm; show 8pm
The Shadow Lounge, 5–7 Brewer Street, London W1F 0RF
Admission: £32 for dating and show, £11 for dating only. Tickets from oldfashioneddating.eventbrite.com.

An interesting new spin on the speed dating concept, this event gives each participant ten “dates” (which I guess must last about nine minutes each), followed by a music/burlesque show. You are matched with your dates by a real live “dating professional”. It describes itself as a “a journey back to 1930s courting” aimed at “cool modern people with old fashioned values”. Not clear if this means it’s aimed at people with a general interest in things vintage.

Hedna’s Vintage Night Club

Saturday 25th February
8.45pm
The Stables, Stockwell Lane, Wavendon, Milton Keynes MK17 8LU
Admission: £14.50 in advance or £16 on the door. Box office: 01908 280800
Dress: Vintage

“Vintage Sweethearts” Harry and Edna offer an immersive 1930s and 1940s night with live music from the Three Belles, DJing from Empire Radio and dance tutors on hand. More at www.homefrontfriends.org.uk/hednas.



Harry and Edna of Hedna’s Vintage Night Club



FOR THE LATEST information on what the Club is up to, who has been arrested, etc., have a squizz at www.newsheridanclub.co.uk. For more photos of Club events go to www.flickr.com/sheridanclub. Those of a technological bent can befriend us electrically at www.facebook.com.

Photograph from the Sheridan Christmas House, courtesy of Robert Beckwith

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